

MY TREATY IS WITH THE CROWN

A project by KENT MONKMAN

With the collaboration of the Montreal Museum
of Fine Arts and the McCord Museum of
Canadian History.

Organized by Michèle Thériault and produced
by the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery.



MARCH 4 – APRIL 16, 2011



Kent Monkman, *Mary*, 2011. High definition video.
 Courtesy of Bailey Fine Arts, Toronto.

WAYS OF THINKING

Ways of Thinking is designed for anyone interested in exploring contemporary art and its exhibition framework. It offers succinct and synthesized information on the exhibition's concept, the artists and the works featured. For the complete version of *Ways of Thinking* that includes bibliographic references, please see our website: www.ellengallery.concordia.ca/2006/en/

Kent Monkman and Miss Chief Eagle Testickle return to Montreal to occupy the Ellen Art Gallery. Their project transforms the gallery into a camp of military tents in which the new "Canada" that emerges in the decisive battle of the Plains of Abraham between the British and the French armies (Generals Wolfe and Montcalm) is invaded by the presence of Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, Monkman's alter ego.

The exhibition brings together new paintings and objects (Miss Chief's personal collection), and a new video by Monkman presented alongside a selection of 19th century European, North American and aboriginal artifacts and paintings borrowed from the collections of the McCord Museum of Canadian History and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Hair as a symbol of power and its removal, as an act of humiliation and domination, is the thematic thread that runs through the environment created by the artist. Referencing two biblical allegories – Mary Magdalene washing Christ's feet and Delilah's betrayal of Samson – and linking them to the French battle with the English Crown and the Prince of Wales' visit to Montreal in 1860, Miss Chief, Monkman's alter ego addresses the relationship of betrayal and entreatment aboriginals have had with European colonizers.

Kent Monkman is a Canadian artist of Cree ancestry who works with a variety of mediums, including painting, film/video, performance, and installation. He has had solo exhibitions at numerous Canadian museums including the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art in Toronto, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, and the Art Gallery of Hamilton. He has participated in various international group exhibitions including: “*We come in peace...*” *Histoires of the Americas*, at the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal, and *The American West* at Compton Verney in Warwickshire, England. Monkman has created site specific performances at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, The Royal Ontario Museum, and at Compton Verney, and has also made Super 8 versions of these performances which he calls “Colonial Art Space Interventions.” His award-winning short film and video works have been screened at various national and international festivals, including the 2007 and 2008 Berlinale, and the 2007 Toronto International Film Festival. His work is represented in numerous public and private collections including the National Gallery of Canada, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Museum London, The Glenbow Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, the Mackenzie Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the National Museum of the American Indian of the Smithsonian Institution. He is represented by: Bailey Fine Arts, Toronto; Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; TrépanierBaer Gallery, Calgary; Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain, Montréal; Galerie Florent Tosin, Berlin.

Kent Monkman’s art practice encompasses painting, installation, film, and video. His work explores subjects including desire, gender, history, and identity. It does so by examining the impact of white culture and Christianity on indigenous peoples and by challenging our understanding of our past via historical representations of First Nations people. Through his own recreations of historical images portraying European domination of indigenous cultures, Monkman’s work questions the accuracy of both these portrayals and the established historical narrative.

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C.M.: And how did you find their (European males) behaviour towards you? What did they do when they first saw you?

M.C.: Of course they treated me like an object... which I'm not ! Though I am completely voluptuous and sexy... I really got bored of that quickly ! So I decided that it was time to turn the tables and be the artist, and not the model.

An interview with Miss Chief Eagle Testickle by Cathy Mattes, 2008

Kent Monkman creates a new *mise en scène* using two highly symbolic events as a backdrop: the confrontation between the French and the English on the Plains of Abraham in 1759 and the visit of the Prince of Wales to Montreal in 1860. The presence of Kent Monkman's alter ego, the sexy and extravagant Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, representative of the red race, reveals itself in her

paintings, objects and clothing, and by way of the moving image. By positioning herself within the narrative she disrupts history’s course and its representation. In her role as diva warrior Miss Chief appropriates two controversial biblical figures, Mary-Magdalene and Delilah, whose actions evoke simultaneously betrayal, submission and audacity and transgression.

In Monkman’s work, an assertive homosexuality takes its place within the historical narratives and codes of representation. His camp aesthetic relentlessly derails the white colonial discourse of civilization. The excessiveness, the theatricality and the ostentatious nature that characterize his aesthetic have the effect of drawing out both what has been erased and concealed in the historical inscription of aboriginal culture and the repressed desire and troubled fascination that have paradoxically contributed to giving it shape.

The exhibition space is constellated with aboriginal and European objects as well as period paintings from the collections of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the McCord Museum of Canadian History. Their cohabitation with Monkman’s work raises many questions about collecting practices and the construction of native representation as well as about the framing of the categories of art and material culture by museums and galleries.

THE WORKS

Wolfe’s Haircut, 2011
Acrylic on canvas
Courtesy of Bailey Fine Arts, Toronto

Montcalm’s Haircut, 2011
Acrylic on canvas
Courtesy of Bailey Fine Arts, Toronto

The Night of September 12, 1759, 2011
Screen, acrylic paint, wooden dowels, rhinestones, monogrammed pillow cases, thread, three channel audio
Courtesy of Bailey Fine Arts, Toronto

Wolfe’s Haircut, 2011
Copper plate etching
Courtesy of Bailey Fine Arts, Toronto

Montcalm’s Haircut, 2011
Copper plate etching
Courtesy of Bailey Fine Arts, Toronto

Mary, 2011
High definition video, 3 min. 18 sec.
Courtesy of Bailey Fine Arts, Toronto

Cree Leggings (Worn in the presence of the Prince of Wales), 2011
Vinyl boots, beads, metal cones, synthetic hair, ribbon, thread
Courtesy of Bailey Fine Arts, Toronto

My Treaty is With The Crown, 2011
Acrylic on canvas
Courtesy of Bailey Fine Arts, Toronto

EXPLORE

- Gender, sexuality, and identity;
- Camp aesthetics and their role in this work;
- The impact of Christianity and colonization on aboriginal people;
- Humour and its use in subverting and undermining established archetypes and power;
- The history of Canadian art and how it is tied to the history of colonization in this country;
- The display and juxtaposition of historical museum objects alongside works produced by the artist.

A FEW QUESTIONS

- The use of space is very important in *My Treaty is with the Crown*. How do the ways in which space is made use of contribute to the narrative that is being advanced here?
- Consider the persona of Miss Chief Eagle Testickle. Who is she and what function does she serve in *My Treaty is with the Crown*?
- Hair acts as a conduit for a thematic thread that runs through this exhibition. What is its function and how is this function illustrated via the artworks, artifacts, and objects presented in this exhibition?
- How are the past, the present, and the future represented in this work? What differentiates one from the other?
- How is history reimaged through images in this work?
- What kind of critique of museum culture takes place in the environment Kent Monkman has created here?

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